

House Bill 1663

By: Representative Mangham of the 94<sup>th</sup>

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

To amend Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," so as to provide for the offering of state funded high school courses in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the History and Literature of the New Testament Era; to provide for the adoption of the curricula for such courses by the State Board of Education; to provide for the topics of instruction, reading materials, and methods of teaching in such courses; to provide for certain matters relating to the employment and assignment of teachers of such courses; to provide for the granting of academic credit for the successful completion of such courses; to provide for the monitoring of the content and teaching of such courses; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

**SECTION 1.**

Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," is amended by adding at the end thereof a new Code section to read as follows:

"20-2-148.

(a)(1) In implementing this Code section, it is the intent of the General Assembly to accomplish the following objectives:

(A) To equip the student with a fundamental understanding of important literary forms contained in the Bible as well as people and symbols often referred to in literature, art, and music;

(B) To equip the student with a fundamental understanding of important biblical contributions to history, law, American community life, and culture;

(C) To give insight into the world views of America's founding fathers and to understand the biblical influences on their views of human rights;

(D) To provide a greater knowledge of Middle Eastern history, geography, religion, and politics; and

(E) To inform the students of the importance of religion in world and national history, without imposing the doctrine of any particular religious sect.

(2) In implementing the course provided for in this Code section, it is the intent of the General Assembly that the following terms and guidelines shall apply:

(A) 'Secular purpose' is defined as those studies which instill in students values such as independent thought, tolerance of diverse views, self-respect, maturity, self-reliance, and logical decision making, and those studies which give students great insight and appreciation of literature, the arts, politics, history, law, social studies, and current events. Secular purpose, for example, should not mean 'nonreligious purpose' but 'general public purpose';

(B) The studies shall be structured and presented in such a manner that the presentation of material neither enhances nor inhibits religion. Incultation or proselytization of any particular doctrine, dogma, religious belief, or theory is prohibited;

(C) There shall be no requirement that a teacher shall have a particular religious belief (or nonreligious belief) or persuasion in order to conduct religious studies;

(D) Funds for the presentation of instruction shall be provided by the school board. If school board funding is not available, then the funds may be raised by the private sector;

(E) The teaching about religion in public schools and the presentation or offering of an elective course in Bible study, comparative religion, or both in the secondary schools is expressly permitted and is constitutional;

(F) Study of the Bible should stress the influence of the Bible on history, culture, the arts, and contemporary issues;

(G) Study of the Bible should permit and encourage a comprehensive and balanced examination of the entire spectrum of ideas and attitudes pertaining to it as a component of human culture;

(H) Study of the Bible should examine the religious dimension of human experience in its broader cultural context, including its relation to economic, political, and social institutions as well as its relation to the arts, language, and culture;

(I) Study of the Bible should be objective and nonsectarian;

(J) Study of the Bible should be academic in nature, stressing student awareness and understanding, not acceptance and conformity;

(K) Study should be descriptive and nonconfessional and should be conducted in an environment free of advocacy;

(L) Study should seek to develop and utilize the various skills, attitudes, and abilities that are essential to history and the social sciences, that is, locating, classifying, and interpreting data; keen observation; critical reading, listening, and thinking; questioning; and effective communication;

(M) Study of the Bible should be academically responsible and pedagogically sound, utilizing accepted methods and materials of the social sciences, history, and literature; and

(N) Study about the Bible should center on the biblical text itself rather than extraneous material and theories which might express a particular theological position rather than the historical presentation found in the Bible.

(b) All public schools with grade nine or above may make available to eligible students in grades nine through 12 an elective course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and an elective course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. The purpose of such courses shall be to accommodate the rights and desires of those teachers and students who wish to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history recorded by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and New Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

(c)(1) No later than February 1, 2007, the State Board of Education shall adopt a curriculum for each course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of this subsection.

(2) The topics to be included in the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era may include the historical background and events of the period; the history of the Kingdom of Israel; the poetry of the Old Testament; the influence of Old Testament history and literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events, including recent and current events in the Middle East. The topics to be included in the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era may include the historical background and events of the period; the life of Jesus of Nazareth; the parables of Jesus; the life and travels of Paul; and the influence of New Testament history and literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events.

(3) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old Testament shall be the basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the

1 book or collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be the basic  
2 text for the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. In addition,  
3 students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including  
4 selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious  
5 and cultural traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the customs and  
6 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New Testaments. The courses  
7 shall familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the Old  
8 and New Testament books were written, the means by which they were preserved, the  
9 languages in which they were written and into which they were translated, and the  
10 historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and New Testaments  
11 into the English language. The local board of education may determine which version  
12 of the Old or New Testament shall be used as the main text or, if the local board of  
13 education does not do so, that determination may be made by the teacher of the course.  
14 No student shall be required to use one version as the sole text of the Old or New  
15 Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a different version of the Old or  
16 New Testament from that chosen by the local board of education or teacher, he or she  
17 shall be permitted to do so.

18 (4) The courses provided for in this Code section shall:

19 (A) Be taught in an objective and nondevotional manner with no attempt made to  
20 indoctrinate the students as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or as to  
21 the correct interpretation thereof;

22 (B) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible;  
23 and

24 (C) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

25 (d) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of  
26 administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and  
27 supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this Code section.  
28 In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on  
29 any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation  
30 or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.  
31 Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be  
32 determined by the local boards of education.

33 (e) On and after July 1, 2007, for the purpose of earning Carnegie unit curriculum credits  
34 at the high school level, satisfactory completion of the course in the History and Literature  
35 of the Old Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half  
36 unit of elective credit, and satisfactory completion of the course in the History and

1 Literature of the New Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for  
2 one-half unit of elective credit; provided, however, that such courses are taught in strict  
3 compliance with the requirements of this Code section.

4 (f) A local board of education may make such arrangements for monitoring the content and  
5 teaching of the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the  
6 course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era as it deems appropriate.

7 (g) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to limit the authority of a local board  
8 of education to offer courses regarding the Old Testament or the New Testament that are  
9 not in compliance with this Code section; provided, however, that no state funds distributed  
10 pursuant to this article shall be expended in connection with such a course that does not  
11 meet the requirements of this Code section.

12 (h) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to prohibit local boards of education  
13 from offering elective courses based upon the books of other religions or societies. In  
14 determining whether to offer such courses, the local board may consider various factors  
15 including, but not limited to, student and parent demand for such courses and the impact  
16 such books have had upon history and culture."

## 17 **SECTION 2.**

18 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2006.

## 19 **SECTION 3.**

20 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.